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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the association between two types of peer relations: sociometric status and dyadic friendship. A sample of 139 second- and third-graders completed a sociometric interview and the Friendship Relations Questionnaire. A subsample of 44 mutual friendship pairs were observed in free play. Friendship patterns were scored with the Dyadic Relationship Q-Set. A total of 124 parents completed measures of child adjustment and personality, including the Child Behavior Checklist and the Childhood Personality Scale. Findings indicated that not only sociometric status, but also self-ratings and observer ratings of dyadic friendship, were associated with adjustment among boys. Neither sociometric status, nor most of the measures of dyadic friendship, were associated with adjustment for girls. It is concluded that sociometric status and dyadic friendship are distinct indexes of peer relations, and both should be considered by researchers. (RH)

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SEX DIFFERENCES IN THE RELATION BETWEEN PATTERNS OF FRIENDSHIP AND ADJUSTMENT

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was to assess the association between two types of peer relations, sociometric status and dyadic friendship, on children's social and behavioral adjustment. A sample of 139 second and third graders completed a sociometric interview and the Friendship Relationship Questionnaire; a subsample of 44 mutual friendship pairs were observed in free play and friendship patterns were scored with the Dyadic Relationship Q-Set. Parents completed measures of adjustment and personality for their children. Results indicated that not only sociometric status but also self-ratings and observer-ratings of dyadic friendship were associated with adjustment for boys; there were far fewer associations for girls.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing literature that documents an association between friendship patterns and adjustment (Berndt & Ladd, 1989; Cowen, Pederson, Babigan, Izzo, & Trost, 1973; French & Waas, 1985; Gottman, Gonso, & Rasmussen, 1975; Oden & Asher, 1977). The purpose of this study was to address two gaps in this literature. First, most studies assess friendship patterns through sociometry only. Other indexes of the quality of friendship patterns need to be studied, for example how children function during dyadic play. Second, most studies have not assessed whether there are different patterns for boys and girls despite the fact that there are established sex differences in both play patterns and in adjustment for school-aged children. We hypothesized that sociometric status would be associated with adjustment for boys, who tend to play in large groups, while quality of dyadic play would be associated with adjustment for girls, who tend to play with best friends.

METHOD

Subject:

The sample consisted of 139 second and third grade children (71 boys and 68 girls) and 124 of their parents. Children were recruited from nine classrooms in four elementary schools located in Southern New Hampshire during the spring of 1989. Individual classroom participation ranged from 68% to 100%; the average participation rate was 85%.

Procedure:

(1) A sociometric interview (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982) was individually administered to all children within each classroom. From the interview, two measures of sociometric status were constructed: social preference (standardized likes most nominations minus likes least nominations per classroom) and social impact (standardized likes most nominations plus likes least nominations per classroom). In addition, mutual friends (those who nominated one another as likes most) were identified with the interview.

(2) 44 mutual friends (20 female same-sex pairs and 24 male same-sex pairs) were observed and videotaped during free play with novel toys for 25 minutes and during a structured drawing task for 10 minutes. The quality of the dyadic play was assessed with the revised Dyadic Relationship Q-Set (Park & Waters, 1988). Following this, the children completed the Friendship Relationship Questionnaire (Furman, 1989). The remaining 51 children who did not have a mutual friend completed the drawing task and the Friendship Relationship Questionnaire while meeting in small groups.

(3) Parent completed the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983) and the Childhood Personality Scale (Cohen, Dibble, & Grawe, 1979) and returned them by mail.

RESULTS

Association Between Sociometric Status and Dyadic Friendship

(1) As Table 1 shows, there were few associations between the two measure of sociometric status and the 7 measures of dyadic friendship for either boys or girls.

Association Between Children's Adjustment and Sociometric Status

(2) Four adjustment variables for the Child Behavior Checklist were regressed on social preference and social impact separately for boys and girls. For boys, social preference was a positive predictor of social competence and school competence and a negative predictor of behavior problems. For girls, neither social preference or social impact was predictive of adjustment (see Table 2).

(3) The four adjustment variables were also regressed on the four factors from the Friendship Relationship Questionnaire. For boys, the model was significant for social competence and school competence. For girls, the model was significant for social competence (see Table 3).

(4) The four adjustment variables were regressed on the three factors from the Dyadic Relationship Q-Set. For boys, the model was significant for school competence. For girls, none of the four models were significant.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Sociometric status and dyadic friendship are distinct indexes of peer relations. When studying peer relations both should be considered.

(2) Sociometric status is associated with adjustment for boys but not for girls. This is consistent with findings in the literature that show that boys tend to play in large groups. The importance of dominance hierarchies for boys may have an evolutionary basis.

(3) Contrary to prediction, most measures of dyadic friendship were not associated with adjustment for girls.

(4) All three sets of friendship measures (the 2 sociometric measures, the 4 questionnaire factors, and the 3 Q-Set factors) were associated with school competence for boys. The direction of effects is not clear and awaits further study.

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TABLE 1

Correlations between Measures of Sociometric Status and Dyadic Friendship by Children's Sex

	Boys		Girls	
	Social Preference	Social Impact	Social Preference	Social Impact
Friendship Relationship Questionnaire				
Warmth/ Closeness	.15	.23*	.13	-.01
Relative Status	.16	.05	.15	-.04
Exclusivity	-.09	.12	.21*	-.06
Conflict	-.26*	.09	-.02	-.05
Dyadic Relationship Q-Set				
Self-Disclosure	.08	-.10	-.17	.31*
Positive Interaction	.19	-.05	-.11	.08
Coordinated Interaction	.18	-.04	-.09	.19

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 2

Standard Multiple Regressions of Children's Adjustment on Sociometric Status

	Boys		
	Predictor Variables		
	Social Preference	Social Impact	R^2
	(standardized regression coefficients)		
Criterion Variables			
Activity Competence	.19	-.17	.063
Social Competence	.47***	-.08	.222***
School Competence	.35**	-.06	.125*
Behavior Problems	-.55***	-.07	.316***

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 2 (continued)

Standard Multiple Regressions of Children's Adjustment on Sociometric Status

	Girls		
	Predictor Variables		
	Social Preference	Social Impact	R^2
	(standardized regression coefficients)		
Criterion Variables			
Activity Competence	.17	-.09	.037
Social Competence	.10	-.09	.019
School Competence	.22	-.09	.056
Behavior Problems	-.29	.13	.101

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 3

Standard Multiple Regressions of Children's Adjustment on the Friendship Relationship Questionnaire

	Boys				
	Predictor Variables				
	Warmth/ Closeness	Relative Status	Exclusivity	Conflict	R^2
	(standardized regression coefficients)				
Criterion Variables					
Activity Competence	-.01	.06	.05	-.06	.006
Social Competence	.24	.17	.01	-.19	.057*
School Competence	.10	.28*	-.31*	-.08	.205**
Behavior Problems	-.06	-.31	.17	-.09	.139

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 3 (continued)

Standard Multiple Regressions of Children's Adjustment on the Friendship Relationship Questionnaire

	Girls				
	Predictor Variables				
	Warmth/ Closeness	Relative Status	Exclusivity	Conflict	R^2
	(standardized regression coefficients)				
Criterion Variables					
Activity Competence	-.09	.07	-.03	-.03	.010
Social Competence	.00	.40**	-.09	-.28*	.220*
School Competence	-.06	.09	-.05	-.19	.044
Behavior Problems	.02	-.17	-.01	.32*	.123

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$